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## (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta

The Discourse on Nanda (Arhathood) | U 3.2

Theme: Nanda overcomes sexual lust

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2009, 2013

### 1 The elder Nanda

#### 1.1 FAMILY BACKGROUND

##### 1.1.1 Childhood and youth

**1.1.1.1** Nanda, a member of the kshatriya class, is the son of Suddhōdana and Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, sister of Mahā Māyā, also Suddhōdana’s co-wife.<sup>1</sup> As such, Nanda is the Buddha’s half-brother. Nanda has a younger sister, called Nandā.<sup>2</sup> Nanda is born only a few days after the Buddha,<sup>3</sup> and when Mahā Māyā dies, Pajāpatī becomes his foster-mother, suckling him herself. (AA 1:340)

**1.1.1.2** He is said to have been called **Nanda** (“delightful”) because his birth brought joy to his parents and kinsmen, and also that he has the bearings of a world monarch (*cakka,vatti*).<sup>4</sup> Not only is Nanda very handsome, but according to the Vinaya, he is less than 4 fingers’ breadth<sup>5</sup> shorter than the Buddha.

**1.1.1.3** His beloved is also named **Nandā** [1.1.1.2], better known as Janapada Kalyāṇī Nandā, where *janapada,kalyāṇī* is clearly an epithet, not her name. Obviously, Nanda sees his beloved as “the country’s beauty” or the most beautiful of the Sakya women. It is also possible that Nandā is not her real name either, but an epithet meaning, “one betrothed or belonging to Nanda.”<sup>6</sup>

**1.1.2 Past good.** According to **the Apadāna**, in the time of Padum’uttara,<sup>7</sup> the 15<sup>th</sup> past buddha from our own Gotama, Nanda made a gift of a piece of exquisite cloth (*vatth’uttama*) for making robe to the Buddha Padum’uttara (Ap 1.57). The karmic fruit of this was that he was born with a golden complexion (*hema,vanna*, like the Buddha). Nanda has an Apadāna (past-life story) to his name, that is, **the Nanda Thera Apadāna** (Ap 13/1:57).

<sup>1</sup> ThaA 2:32; SnA 1:357.

<sup>2</sup> Comy identifies her with **Sundarī Nandā** (Thī 82-86), whose Comy adds: “Furthermore, on account of being endowed with beauty, she was called Sundarī Nandā Janapada Kalyāṇī, “beautiful Nandā, the country’s beauty” (*apara,bhāge rūpa,sampattiyā sundarī,nandā, janapada,kalyāṇī ca paññāyittha*, ThīA 81, where *janapada,kalyāṇī* is clearly an epithet). She is also the foremost of nuns who are meditators (*jhāyīnam*, A 1:25). Sometimes, she is confused with Abhirūpā Nandā (whom the Buddha shows a projection of a body gradually decaying, Thī 19 f), or even with Janapada Kalyāṇī Nandā (Nanda’s own betrothed). [1.1.1.3]

<sup>3</sup> Nanda’s meeting with the Buddha here is during his first visit to Kapila,vatthu, ie, in Phagguna (Feb-Mar) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the ministry, when the Buddha is around 36-38 years old (D 16,5.27/2:151 @ SD 9); see SD 47.12 (1.2). **Nanda’s age** is problematic. As a kshatriya noble, he is unlikely to be marrying so late, here around 36 (being born days after the Buddha). Either he marries late or he is much younger (say, 15 years younger). There is also the possibility that the Buddha could be 15 years younger than the traditional dates, see eg **Dahara S** (S 3.1), where Pasenadi (the same age as the Buddha) says that “he is still young, and only newly gone forth” (S 3.1.5), SD 42.11.

<sup>4</sup> UA 168; ApA 315; VA 5:1010.

<sup>5</sup> “4 fingers’ breadth,” *catur’aṅgul’omaka* (V 4:173,9), ie *catu* (“four”) + *aṅguli* (“fingers”) + *omaka* (“less”). Comy explains this as being less than 4 fingers’ breadth (in height) (*catuhi aṅgulehi ūnaka-p.pamāṇo*, VA 885). By our measurement, “4 fingers’ breadth” is prob about 7 cm or 3 ins.

<sup>6</sup> On this name, see further DPPN 1:934: Janapadakalyāṇī Nandā.

<sup>7</sup> Padum’uttara (“the lotus of the supreme state”) is the 13<sup>th</sup> buddha since Taṇhankara, or the 15<sup>th</sup> before our Gotama. See SD 36.2 (3.4.3).

In the time of Attha,dassī Buddha,<sup>8</sup> Nanda was a giant turtle (*mahā kacchapa*), living in the river Vinatā, and, seeing the Buddha on the bank waiting to cross, he took him on his back and swam swiftly across to the other bank (ThaA 2:32). The Apadāna verses here are identical to those of Taraṇiya Thera of **the Apadāna 485**, which is clearly Nanda’s Apadāna.<sup>9</sup> The title *taraṇiya thera* means “the elder who goes across,” an allusion to his taking the past buddha Attha,dassī across the river. As such, Nanda has two past stories, that is, the Nanda Thera Apadāna (Ap 13) and the Taraṇiya Apadāna (Ap 485) .

The Nanda Thera Apadāna further says that Nanda was king for many past lives. Seven thousand world-cycles ago, he was king four times with the name Ceḷa. Sixty thousand cycles ago, he was again king in four births, named Upaceḷa.<sup>10</sup> Later, five thousand cycles ago, he was four times a world monarch (*cakka,vatti*),<sup>11</sup> and his name then, too, was Cēla. In **the Kuru,dhamma Jātaka** (J 276), Nanda is identified as the viceroy (*uparājā*) of the ancient Kuru kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 NANDA AS A MONK

### I

#### 1.2.1 The Buddha visits Kapila,vatthu

**1.2.1.1** A year after his awakening, the Buddha visits Kapila,vatthu. On the second day<sup>13</sup> of his visit, he goes for alms to the house Nanda, whose lustral consecration, house-warming and wedding festivities were going on.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the meal-offering, the Buddha wishes Nanda good fortune and then hands him his bowl to be taken to the monastery. Nanda, holding the bowl, follows the Buddha out of the palace.<sup>15</sup>

**1.2.1.2** Nanda is to be married to **Janapada Kalyāṇī Nandā**. Her name is clearly Nandā (feminine), while *janapada kalyāṇī* is her epithet, which means literally “the country’s beauty,” that is, the most beautiful of the Sakya women; in short, “the beauty of the land” [1.1.1.3]. The Sutta commentary describes her as having the ideal beauty, being free of the 6 physical faults and endowed with the 5 signs of beauty.

The 6 physical faults (*cha sarīra,dosa*) of a woman (according to the Indian men of the Buddha’s time) which Janapada Kalyāṇī is free of are that she is neither too tall nor too short, neither too fat nor too thin, neither too dark nor too pale:<sup>16</sup> her complexion is simply divine. Moreover, she is endowed with the 5 signs of beauty (*pañca,kalyāṇa*), that is, beauty of skin, of flesh, of nails, of bone, and of youth.

She is also said to be a literally radiant person, that is, her skin is so radiant that it lights up an area of 10 or 12 hands<sup>17</sup> around her. Or, her skin is fragrant like priyangu or *Panicum italicum* (*piyaṅgu*) and beautiful like gold. Her hands, feet and lips are like the colour of red coral or red woolen cloth. Her skin and flesh are like the essence of lac. All her twenty nails are like torrents of milk. Her 32 teeth are compact

<sup>8</sup> Attha,dassī (“the seer of good, benefit, meaning, etc”) is the 17<sup>th</sup> past Buddha since Taṇhaṅkara, or the 11<sup>th</sup> before our Gotama. See SD 36.2 (3.4.3).

<sup>9</sup> Ap 485/2:428 f; ApA 314.

<sup>10</sup> Ap 13.6-7/57.

<sup>11</sup> On *cakka,vatti*, see SD 36.10 (2).

<sup>12</sup> J 276/2:381.

<sup>13</sup> On the *third* day of his visit to Kapila,vatthu, according to UA 169, which also details how Nanda keeps hoping that the Buddha would take back his bowl at some point or other before leaving his home, but is unable to tell the Buddha, “Please take back your bowl.” It is at this point that Janapada Kalyāṇī rushes to her window, “with hair half-combed” (*upaḍḍh’ullikhitehi kesehi*), with water droplets dripping from it, looking longingly at Nanda and telling him to hurry back (UA 169).

<sup>14</sup> *Nandassa rāja,kumārassa abhiseka,geha-p,pavesana,vivāha,maṅgalesu vattamānesu tassa geham gantvā*, J 1:91.

<sup>15</sup> J 1:91, 2:92-94; UA 169; SnA 273 f.

<sup>16</sup> The 6 physical faults are also absent from the “woman jewel” (*itthī,ratana*) of a wheel-turner (*cakka,vatti*): see **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,39), SD 2.22, where we see other details; the “woman jewel” is also at **Cakka,vatti S** (D 26,24) @ SD 36.10 (2.3.5).

<sup>17</sup> A “hand” (*hattha*) is the length from the elbow to the finger-tip.

and lovely like diamonds—such is her beauty of bone. Although she may live on to 120, she would look like 16, without any grey hair.<sup>18</sup> (UA 170)

**1.2.2 Nanda as a monk.** According to a number of accounts, especially **the (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta** (U 22) and the Commentaries, Janapada Kalyāṇī, wistfully seeing Nanda go, reminds him to return quickly. At the monastery, however, the Buddha asks Nanda if he would like to become a monk, and Nanda, feeling his noblesse oblige, is unable to refuse, and so agrees with reservation.<sup>19</sup>

**The (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta** opens by recounting how Nanda, as monk, is tormented with thoughts and feelings for his beloved who is awaiting him, so that he becomes despondent and unwell [§§1-8]. The Buddha suggests that they visit Tāvātimsa, the heaven of the 33 devas [§9]. On the way there, while passing above the Himalayas, Nanda sees the charred remains of a female monkey. The Buddha asks him whether Janapada Kalyāṇī is more beautiful than that. The answer is a clear affirmative.

On reaching Tāvātimsa, they see Sakra, the deva leader, surrounded and waited on by his ruddy-footed apsaras, most beautiful to behold [§10]. When the Buddha again asks him the same question, Nanda admits that these nymphs are far more beautiful than even Janapada Kalyāṇī, so that she looks like a singed she-monkey! [§§1-141] The Buddha then guarantees that they would all be his, if he lives the holy life with dedication. Nanda eagerly agrees [§§15-16].

On their return to Jeta's grove, the Buddha relates the incident to other monks,<sup>20</sup> especially his monastic companions [§§17-18]. Nanda's companions tease him, resulting in his realization of his own lustfulness and the incongruity of his actions as a monastic [§19]. As a result, he feels “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” by it [§20].

He goes into meditation retreat, where he exerts all his effort and, in no long time, attains arhathood [§21]. A devata informs the Buddha of Nanda's breakthrough [§§22-24]. Nanda goes to the Buddha and jubilantly absolves him from his promise [§25]. The Buddha acknowledges Nanda's arhathood [§§26-27], and we then get a hint of why the Buddha employs the skillful means on Nanda in the first place [§28]. The (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta then closes with an udana,<sup>21</sup> a verse of uplift [§§29-30].

The Commentaries go on to say that after the devata informs the Buddha of Nanda's arhathood, the Buddha relates **the Sangāmāvacara Jataka** (J 182), showing how, in the past, too, Nanda was quick to follow advice.<sup>22</sup> The Buddha then relates another story, an amusing account of Kappata and his donkey to show that it is not the first time, too, that Nanda easily falls for a woman. In the story, the male donkey in the story is Nanda and the female donkey Janapada Kalyāṇī (DhA 1:103 f)

**1.3 EMINENCE.** Later, on seeing how well-restrained Nanda is, the Buddha declares him the foremost of the monks in sense-restraint (*indriyesu gutta, dvārānam*).<sup>23</sup> According to Dhamma, pāla, Nanda first aspires to this eminence in the time of Padum'uttara Buddha. (ThaA 2:31)

Nanda, in his **Thera, gāthā**, also recollects that he “was addicted to adorning” (*maṇḍanam anuyūjji-sam*), but with the Buddha's help, he attains awakening (Tha 157 f). Here *maṇḍana* (by itself) refers to both the wearing or adorning oneself with ornaments as well as the using of make-up etc. In the phrase *maṇḍana, vibūsana...* it probably refers to personal make-up and dressing up, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Cf the lady Visākhā, whose youth is described in the same word (DhA 1:408); she is said to have the strength of 5 elephants (DhA 1:409).

<sup>19</sup> U 22/21-24; Tha 157 f; J 1:91, 2:92-94; DhA 1:96, 105; UA 169-171; SnA 273 f.

<sup>20</sup> DhA 1:119; UA 173.

<sup>21</sup> “Udana” (*udāna*) is here used as an anglicized term, hence without diacritics.

<sup>22</sup> J 182/2:92-95.

<sup>23</sup> A 1.230/1:25. There are at least 2 ways of understanding how such declarations are made: (1) The Buddha, on account of his foreknowledge (the “omniscience” of later Buddhism), knows such a monk or person (or persons. in the case of Tapussa and Bhallika) to be the foremost in a particular quality, (2) The council elders or sutta reciters, esp the Aṅguttara reciters compiled such a list after the fact.

**The Apadāna**, too, records how “From being devoted to the grasp of sense-pleasures, habitually delighting in the joy of lust, from which there is peace with the Buddha exhorting, ‘Go forth!’” (*rāga,ratto sukha,sīlo kāmesu gedham āyuto | buddhena codito santo tato tvam pabbajissasi*) (Ap 13.4).

In the **(Aṭṭhaka) Nanda Sutta** (A 8.9), the Buddha explains how Nanda, despite his worldly qualities, is able to gain awakening. Despite being a son of family, strong, charming, strong in lust,<sup>24</sup> he later trains himself in guarding his sense-doors, in moderate eating, in wakefulness, and in mindfulness and clear comprehension.<sup>25</sup>

**1.4 NANDA AS A FOREST MONK.** The Vinaya records an interesting origin story for **Pācittiya 92** as that of Nanda’s wearing a robe made to look like that of the Buddha’s own, so that other monks think that he is the Buddha, Nanda being only slightly shorter than the Buddha [1.1.1.2]! Upon discovering this, the Buddha chides him for his presumptuousness. The rule is then proclaimed that no monk is to make their robe to the same dimensions as those of the Buddha’s. (V 4:173)

Apparently, this Vinaya origin story is based on an account given in **the (Cīvara) Nanda Sutta** (S 21.8), where it is said that once Nanda dons well-pressed and well-ironed robes, painted his eyes (with collyrium, *añjana*), and with a glazed bowl (all of this suggesting the demeanour of a coenobitical or settled monk). The Buddha, however, disapproves of such conduct, saying that it would not inspire true faith in others.<sup>26</sup>

The Commentary explains that Nanda intentionally dresses himself up in this manner to see the Buddha’s response. If he approves of it, Nanda would live that way all his life. Otherwise (if the Buddha disapproves), he will wear rag-ropes and live in a remote dwelling. (SA 2:239). This commentarial story suggests a time when the Buddhist community had grown large and become more settled so that such a story would induce monastics to be inclined to live the forest life.<sup>27</sup> [2.3.1.1]

Nanda, as we know, renounced the world in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Buddha ministry, during the Buddha’s first visit to Kapila,vatthu. During these early years of the first period,<sup>28</sup> the monks were mostly eremites or wandering monks. However, if we accept the accounts of the donations the Bamboo Grove by king Bimbisāra, and other such monastic parks, we can assume that they were also settled monks in such parks, although these monastery were forested parks with scattered monastic cells and an assembly area, but not built-up complexes of buildings that we often see today.

## 2 Skilful means

**2.1 UNIQUE SUTTA? The (Arahatta) Nanda Sutta** probably records the *only* instance where the Buddha apparently employs an actual skillful means (*upāya*), “in which he deceives an individual into doing, through the wrong motive, which is to his ultimate benefit, and which was to witness full development in the Lotus Sūtra”<sup>29</sup> (UA:M 56). Let us first examine what Dhammapāla,<sup>30</sup> the commentator on the Udāna and this Sutta, has to say.

<sup>24</sup> Respectively: *kula,putto...balava...pāsādiko...tibba,rāgo*.

<sup>25</sup> Respectively: *indriyesu gutta,dvāro, bhojane mattaññū, jāgariyam anuyutto, sati,sampajaññena samannāgato* (A 8.9/4:166-168), SD 84.14; AA 4:73.

<sup>26</sup> S 21.8/2:281 @ SD 91.6.

<sup>27</sup> See **(Cīvara) Nanda S** (S 21.8), SD 91.6 Intro for an explanation. Cf a similar case in the conduct of **Tissa the fat**, an elderly monk (of junior rains) who dresses in a similar way, in the hope of attracting respect and comfort (DhA 1.3/1:3745): there are 2 related suttas on him: **(Assu) Tissa S** (S 21.9), SD 91.7 & **(Thīna,middha) Tissa S** (S 22.84), SD 32.12.

<sup>28</sup> On the 2 periods of the Buddha’s ministry, see SD 40a.1 (1.3).

<sup>29</sup> On the Lotus Sutra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra), a Mahāyāna work, see SD 40b.2 (2.8.2).

<sup>30</sup> Dhamma,pāla (c 5<sup>th</sup> cent), or Ācāriya Dhammapāla (to distinguish him from other namesakes), was a Tamil commentator of the Pali texts who lived in south India, just after Buddhaghosa (early 5<sup>th</sup> cent, northern Indian) and Buddhadatta (4<sup>th</sup> cent, south Indian Tamil) after him. The three were all exegetes of the Mahāvihāra tradition in Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka. See Ency Bsm sv.

**2.2 THE BUDDHA AS A DOCTOR.** According to Dhammapāla, the Buddha invites Nanda to go forth because he sees no other way of extricating Nanda from his sensual lust except by a skillful means (*upāya*). This skillful means is to bring Nanda to Tāvatiṃsa and show him the sensually beautiful apsaras or celestial nymphs (*accharā*) (UA 170).

As if using poison to fight poison,<sup>31</sup> the Buddha skillfully lets Nanda see the celestial beauty of the apsaras. Dhammapāla says that this is like a skilled physician, when healing a patient of excessive humours, first “softens” (*ukkiledetvā*) the bodily humours with drinking-oil and so on, and then causes them to be thoroughly expelled (*nīharāpeti*) through vomiting and voiding, even so the Buddha tames those capable of being tamed by softening Nanda’s excessive lustfulness by showing him the apsaras to expel it without any remains with the medicine that is the eightfold path. (UA 172)

### 2.3 SUTTA STRUCTURE

**2.3.0** The Sutta can be divided into 4 more or less equal parts:

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| (1) Nanda is unhappy as a monk                              | [§§1-8];   |
| (2) The Buddha takes him to Tāvatiṃsa to see the apsaras    | [§§9-17];  |
| (3) Nanda realizes his folly and works toward arhathood     | [§§18-24]; |
| (4) The Buddha learns of Nanda’s awakening and his response | [§§25-30]. |

#### 2.3.1 Nanda in love

**2.3.1.1** As noted by Dhammapāla, the Buddha notices that Nanda has not only deeply infatuated with Janapada Kalyāṇī, but also caught up in lust. As such, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for him to progress spiritually in this life itself. Becoming a monk is only a first step in this difficult process for Nanda’s inner conversion. The process is painfully slow for Nanda, as he pines for his beloved.

However, if we carefully examine **the (Cīvara) Nanda Sutta** (S 21.8), we could say that there is a time when, as an unawakened monk, he wonders if he should be a coenobite (a settled monk) or an eremite (a wandering forest monk) [1.4]. This is probably the best way to interpret this Sutta, since it is highly improbable that an arhat would don well-pressed and well-ironed robes, paint his eyes (presumably with collyrium), and use a glazed bowl (a luxurious item)<sup>32</sup> [1.4]. Indeed, we could say that these are the actions of someone slightly unhinged, such as a monk frustrated by losing a woman he deeply loves.<sup>33</sup>

**2.3.1.2** A worldling might accuse the Buddha of being callous, of even being a marriage-breaker. The reality of the situation is that the Buddha has only *asked* Nanda whether he would like to become a monk. Many others have turned down or ignored the Buddha.<sup>34</sup> Nanda, however, probably out of noblesse oblige, or simply from love, admiration and respect for an elder brother, simply could not say no.

Perhaps, Nanda even feels compelled to follow the Buddha, as if his good karma is ripening. Indeed, if we are being invited by the Buddha himself to ordain, surely this is a special circumstance, one that is fuelled by our past good. Such is the case, for example, of Āṅguli,māla, who is just as caught up in a powerful self-absorbed emotion. However, instead of love, it is, in Āṅguli,māla’s case, just the opposite: hate and violence.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cf how Ānanda heals a nun who is infatuated with him: (**Taṇhā**) **Bhikkhuṇī S** (A 4.159), SD 10.14.

<sup>32</sup> S 21.8/2:281 (SD 91.6).

<sup>33</sup> Accounts of Nanda, esp his difficulties and conversion, are given in **Nanda-t,thera Vatthu** (DhA 1.9/1:115-125), and also J 1:85-92; U 3.2/2:21-24; a parallel, but with a different past story, in **Saṅgāmāvacara J** (J 182/2:91-95). See also comy on Tha 157 f (ThaA 2:31-34) & AA 1:314-317.

<sup>34</sup> Two other cases of monks caught in lust are those of Moliya Phagguna (**Kakacūpama S**, 21,7.4), SD 38.1, and of Arittha (**Alagaddūpama S**, M2,27), SD 3.13. For other cases on “non-conversions,” see SD 1.4 (2.3).

<sup>35</sup> See **Āṅguli,māla S** (M 86,2-5), SD 5.11.

Yet the Buddha is there for him, and effectively converts him. In both instances, the Buddha sees that, in their respective negative root emotions, they are each ready to see the light. In the darkest of night, even a firefly shines brilliant, but here we have the Buddha, the kinsman of the sun.

### **2.3.2 Nanda in heaven**

**2.3.2.1** In an interesting way, the Buddha’s bringing Nanda to Tāvatiṃsa to see the voluptuous apsarās is like pouring oil into a raging fire or adding poison to poison—giving Nanda what he is obsessed with—or what in **rational emotive behaviour therapy** (REBT) is called “rational-emotive imagery.”<sup>36</sup> Psychologically, this is a form of intense mental practice which establishes new wholesome emotional patterns and habits. The client imagines himself thinking, feeling, and behaving exactly the way that he would like it to be in real life.<sup>37</sup>

The rational-emotive imagery technique is to “flood” the client’s mind (rational) and heart (emotive), thinking and feeling, with everything (as far as possible) with whatever he is obsessed with. The process here is that he does not really know the actual effects of his obsession, and has over-exaggerated its pleasures and benefits. Or, perhaps, the client has no control over himself in being attracted to his goal. It’s like a child who wants a toy very badly, but upon actually getting it, he soon tires and forgets about it.

**2.3.2.2** In this case, we could say that the Buddha is very clear and skilled in what he is doing with Nanda. In an important way, he knows exactly how Nanda would react to the heavenly vision, and its psychological implications. In a sense, we could see Nanda here as an adolescent deeply mired in sexual lust. Sexual lust gets stronger when we are unable to obtain and enjoy the person we desire.<sup>38</sup>

But what if we were really to get exactly what we desire, or were revealed to some sensual pleasure that is beyond what we could have imagined? Nanda, as it were, would let go of his current pleasure balloon, that is, Janapada Kalyāṇī, to grasp at a new, bigger and more colourful pleasure-balloon, that is, the celestial apsarās. Sexuality narcissistically feeds upon itself, and grows on account of its lack of any real gratification. But what is it that bursts even this celestial balloon? [2.3.3]

**2.3.2.3** Let’s take a step back and examine the story of Nanda’s vision of the celestial nymphs. **Did the Buddha really bring Nanda to Tāvatiṃsa?** Or is it only a vision induced or inspired by the Buddha? The Udāna Commentary mentions both these possibilities (UA 171 f). If we are to apply the teachings of **the Neyy’attha Nīt’attha Sutta** (A 2.3,5+6), then this story is clearly one “whose meaning is to be drawn out” (*neyy’attha*).

In fact, it is easier to understand and accept the Buddha as, in some way, a modern psychotherapist<sup>39</sup> using **graphic story-telling or guided visualization**—or in the Buddha’s case, some kind of psychic projection—to give Nanda a clear idea (a rational-emotive imagery) of the realities of his fixation. In other words, before a client could abandon a fixation, he must first realize that it *is* a fixation. It is easier to deal with what we can actually see.

However, the Buddha, in presenting Nanda with the heavenly vision, is only feeding him with what he thinks he desires, and preparing him for something bigger that is to come. Since sexuality is the most selfish of human acts,<sup>40</sup> extraordinary efforts are needed to expose its true nature. When this selfishness is openly known, we begin to see it in proper perspective. What happens then?

<sup>36</sup> See eg G Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, 2001:307.

<sup>37</sup> See M C Maultsby, *Rational Behavior Therapy*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984. See [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4684-4100-0\\_8#page-1](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4684-4100-0_8#page-1).

<sup>38</sup> With **Kisā Gotamī** who loses her only child and falls into protracted denial, the Buddha gently exposes her to the true reality of life and death that she is unable to appreciate, so that at the end of the day, she is healed. This is a case of “flooding.” See SD 43.2.

<sup>39</sup> Such as ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy): see SD 43.1: The ACT therapeutic process.

<sup>40</sup> See **Love**, SD 38.4 (3.2.2): Biological self-love.

### 2.3.3 Nanda awakens

**2.3.3.1** The bubble of sexual lust bursts when we realize that it is the most selfish form of love, indeed, a *lowest* form of self-love, the most narcissistic, where we would only be gratified, it seems, when we are able to absorb the other person totally into our physical being. But there are many other people around, and for that reason, we do not feel comfortable when this becomes common knowledge—the knowledge or perception that we are the most selfish or narcissistic of persons.

When Nanda’s companions hear that the Buddha has “guaranteed” that he would gain the celestial nymphs if he lives the holy life, they tease him [§19]. This is an aspect of monastic life that is difficult to appreciate unless we have lived it. It also has to do with a psychology of humour and joking.<sup>41</sup> Renunciation and benefitting from renunciation are simply a contradiction in terms! Renunciation is letting go, and here Nanda is taking it up for the sake of a reward!

**2.3.3.2** Nanda realizes that his desires and attitude are incongruous with his monk state. The Sutta reports that he feels “troubled, ashamed, disgusted” by this [§20]. This self-knowing, often perceived as guilt or remorse, even despair (a feeling that something is not right with us) is a basis for **samvega**,<sup>42</sup> and a beginning of detaching ourselves from sexual fixation, or a need to feel loved, wanted, or appreciated.

A natural response to this self-revelation is to at once get out of the situation, as it were, to start anew, like a tribal youth on a vision quest. In the case of a true monastic, it would be to go into solitary meditation retreat. Nanda does just this, “dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute,” and attains arhat-hood, the very goal of renunciation and spirituality. [§21]

**2.3.3.3** Throughout the process of the “**skillful means**” of healing, rehabilitating and liberating Nanda, the Buddha clearly comprehends what he is doing and what would happen. The Buddha *guarantees Nanda that if he lives the holy life, he would win the celestial nymphs*. Clearly, if Nanda were to become a stream-winner, or even to simply live virtuously as a monk, he would be reborn in a heaven in due course.

What is left unsaid is that there are higher possibilities and rewards. One of the rewards of living a truly virtuous life is divine bliss of the heavens, of which the heaven of the Thirty-three is one of the lowest. It is a mere second above the human plane, above which are the dhyanic form realms and the formless realms.<sup>43</sup> The bliss in such higher realms well surpasses that of Tāvātimsa.

Anyway, since Nanda has attained arhat-hood, which is well outside of samsara itself, and even more blissful, indeed incomparably blissful, there is no worth at all in mentioning the bliss of Tāvātimsa, which includes the celestial nymphs. In other words, the offer, as it were, has become naturally meaningless. null and void.

### 2.3.4 Truly skillful means: no lying involved

**2.3.4.1** Throughout the Buddha’s intercession in Nanda’s case, it must be clearly understood that *no falsehood*, no false promises were made. In the case of the parable of the burning house in **the Lotus Sutra**, a Mahāyāna work, the father clearly lied to the children playing in the burning house. They are promised goat-carts, deer-carts and ox-carts, but all they get when they emerged from the burning house is a single cart drawn by white bullocks. In the Mahāyāna, the ends seems to justify the means.

**2.3.4.2** On the other hand, in the case of the Buddha’s promising Nanda the celestial nymphs, it is a valid wager. On closer examination, we can more broadly see it is a transcendental prank—the Buddha’s sense of humour—at work here: it is as if he is saying, “I will give you what you desire, but you must first

<sup>41</sup> Such humour would at best (or at worst) be merely some gentle bantering. Vinaya rules such as Pāc 60 (V 1:123,-22 ff) :: Nuns’ Pāc 141 & Pāc 52 (V 4:111,7) :: Nuns’ Pāc 133, eg, prohibit practical joking.

<sup>42</sup> On samvega (*samvega*), see SD 1.11 (3) & SD 8 (7f).

<sup>43</sup> On Buddhist cosmology, see SD 1.7: Table 1.7.

work for it.” It’s like a wise teacher promising a gluttonous student or a deliriously hungry man that if he were able to finish his current meal, he would be given his favourite food, some sumptuous exotic dish. However, after he has finished his normal meal and surfeited, he finds he has lost all appetite for that special sumptuous exotic dish. He freely turns it down and frees the Buddha from his promise.

As an arhat, Nanda has no more desire for the celestial nymphs, and furthermore he frees the Buddha from his promise [§25]. Clearly, not lying or deceit is involved, but good promises, and an improvement in the situation, where an old promise does not apply any more. There is neither breath of promise nor lying involved in the whole transaction.

**2.3.4.3** The bottom line is that the Buddha, in inviting Nanda to be a monk [2.3.3.3], is simply doing what a buddha would do. It would even be more uncharacteristic of him to allow Nanda to go on with his marriage when he knows the time is right for Nanda’s awakening. In showing Nanda the heavens is what a good teacher would at least do for a student. But to prepare the way to nirvana is something only the Buddha or his awakened disciple can do—or we can embark on this course ourselves, as Nanda has done.

— — —

## The Discourse on Nanda (Arhathood)

U 3.2

**1** Thus have I heard.

At one time, the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s park in Jeta’s grove outside Sāvattihī.

### Nanda is dissatisfied with the holy life

**2** Now, at that time, the venerable Nanda, the Blessed One’s brother and his maternal aunt’s son, informed some monks, thus:

“Avuso, I live the holy life unhappily. I’m unable to keep up with the holy life. I would like to give up the training to return to the low life.”<sup>44</sup>

**3** Then, a certain monk approached the Blessed One. Having gone up to the Blessed One, saluted him. Then, he said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, the venerable Nanda, the Blessed One’s brother and maternal aunt’s son, informed some monks, thus:

‘Avuso, I live the holy life unhappily. [22] I’m unable to keep up with the holy life. I would like to give up the training to return to the low life.’

### The Buddha questions Nanda

**4** Then the Blessed One addressed the certain monk, thus:

“Avuso, the teacher summons Nanda.”

“Yes, bhante,” replied the monk.

**5** He approached the venerable Nanda, and said this to the venerable Nanda:

“Avuso Nanda, the teacher summons you.”

“Yes, bhante,” the venerable Nanda replied to that monk.’

**6** He approached the Blessed One, saluted him and sat down at one side.

<sup>44</sup> *Anabhirato ahaṃ āvuso brahma, cariyāṃ carāmi, na sakkomi brahma, cariyāṃ sandhāretuṃ, sikkhaṃ paccakkhāya hīnāyāvattissāmīti.*



Seated thus at one side, the Blessed One said this to the venerable Nanda:

“Is it true, Nanda, that you informed some monks thus:

‘*Avuso, I live the holy life unhappily. I’m unable to keep up with the holy life. I would like to give up the training to return to the low life.*’”

“Yes, bhante.”

**7** “**But why, Nanda, do you live the holy life unhappily**, unable to keep up with the holy life, and would like to give up the training to return to the low life?”

“The Sakya lady, bhante, who is to me the country’s beauty, with hair half-combed, looking on as I was leaving the house, said this to me:<sup>45</sup>

‘Please return quickly, young lord!’<sup>46</sup>

**8** Indeed, bhante, recollecting that, *I live the holy life unhappily. I’m unable to keep up with the holy life. I would like to give up the training to return to the low life.*”

### The Tavatimsa nymphs

**9** Then the Blessed One, grasping the venerable Nanda by the arm and, just as a strong man would stretch out his bent arm or bend back his stretched arm,<sup>47</sup> even so, they disappeared from Jeta’s grove and appeared amongst the devas of the Thirty-three.

**10** Now, at that time, some 500 apsaras [celestial nymphs]<sup>48</sup> had come to attend to Sakra, the leader of the devas. They were dove-footed.<sup>49</sup>

### The Buddha’s skillful means

**11** Then the Blessed One addressed the venerable Nanda,

“Do you, Nanda, see these 500 dove-footed nymphs?”

“Yes, bhante.”

**12** “What do you think, Nanda, who is more beautiful, fairer to behold, more charming: the country’s beauty amongst the Sakyas or these 500 dove-footed nymphs?”

**13** “Just like the singed monkey without ears and nose, bhante,<sup>50</sup>

even so, bhante, is that country’s beauty of the Sakyas when compared to these 500 dove-footed apsaras! [23]

She comes not into any consideration at all, not even by a fraction, there is no contrast at all.<sup>51</sup>

**14** Rather, it is these 500 apsaras who are simply more beautiful, fairer to behold, more charming!”

<sup>45</sup> *Sākiyānī maṃ* [Be Ee Ce so; Se *mama*; Comy glosses as *maṃ*, UA 171] *bhante janapada, kalyāṇī gharā nikkhamantassa* [Comy *nikkhamantam*, UA 170] *upaḍḍh’ullikhitehi kesehi apaloketvā maṃ etad avoca*.

<sup>46</sup> *Tuvaṭṭam kho ayya,putta āgaccheyyāsīti*. On *ayya,putta*, see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3,1.6.1/1:92), SD 21.3 n.

<sup>47</sup> The prec 2 lines: *Atha kho bhagavā āyasmantaṃ nandaṃ bāhāyaṃ gahetvā seyyathāpi nāma balavā puriso samīñjitaṃ* [Be so; Ce Ee Ke Se *sammiñjitaṃ*] *vā bāhaṃ pasāreyya, pasāritaṃ vā bāhaṃ samīñjeyya* [Be so; Ce Ee Ke Se *sammiñjeyya*].

<sup>48</sup> “Apsaras” or “celestial nymphs” (Skt *apsaras, apsarā*): M 1:253,10, 337,27\*, 2:64,10 =V 3:17,22; M 2:64,12; U 22,24; Thī 374; Miln 169,27; J 2:93,7, 5:153,28\*, 454,3\*, 469,5, 6:269,28\*, 289,27\*, 590,16\*; Vv 94, 152, 318 f (cf MA 2:24,3), 971; DhA 3:8, 19; PvA 46. See sv CPD & DP. For details, see **Subha Thī** 374b n @ SD 20.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Kakuṭṭa, pādāni* [Be so; Ee *-padāni*], U 22,26 f. Comys explain that their feet are ruddy or crimson as a result of good karma arising from giving alms of massage oil (*makkhaṇa*), UA 172,8 = DhA 118,27; AA 1:318,2; Miln 169,27; *~iniyo* DhA 1:423,15; *inīnaṃ*, DhA 1:119,32, 423. *Makkhaṇa, tela* (Skt *mraṅsana*) is oil for rubbing in, anointing; (medically, eg in *Suśruta*) ointment, oil (SED); cf DA 281 f; UA 231.

<sup>50</sup> *Seyyathā pi bhante paluṭṭha, makkaṭṭi kaṇṇa, nāsa-c, chinnā*. *Paluṭṭha* is not in any current dictionary. Comy glosses it as “with limbs, great and small, burning” (*jhām’anga, paccāṅga*, UA 172).

<sup>51</sup> *Saṅkhyam pi* [Be Ee Se so; Ce *saṅkham pi*] *nōpeti, kala, bhāgam pi nōpeti, upanidhim pi nōpeti*. This phrase is stock: **Bāla Paṇḍita S** (M 129,9.2;3:166), SD 2.22; **Nakha, sika S** (S 20.2/2:263), SD 67.5; **Nanda S** (U 3.2,13), SD 43.7./22.

### The Buddha's "offer"

15 "Delight in it, Nanda! Delight in it, Nanda! I will be your surety in that you will win these 500 dove-footed apsaras."<sup>52</sup>

16 "If, bhante, the Blessed One is my surety that I will win these 500 dove-footed apsaras [celestial nymphs], then I, bhante, will delight in the holy life under the Blessed One!"<sup>53</sup>

### Back in Jeta's grove

17 Then the Blessed One, grasping the venerable Nanda by the arm and, *just as a strong man would stretch out his bent arm or bend back back his stretched arm*, even so, they disappeared from devas of Tāvātimsa and appeared in Jeta's grove.

18 Now the monks heard thus:

"It is said that the venerable Nanda, the Blessed One's brother and his maternal aunt's son, lives the holy life for the sake of apsaras."<sup>54</sup> The Blessed One, it is said, *guarantees that he will win those 500 dove-footed apsaras!*"

### Nanda is teased

19 The companion monks<sup>55</sup> of the venerable Nanda began to address him with the word "hireling" (*bhataka*)<sup>56</sup> and the word "one who is bought" (*upakkitaka*):<sup>57</sup>

"The venerable Nanda, it is said, is a *hireling*! The venerable Nanda, it is said, is *one who is bought*! The venerable Nanda, it is said, lives the holy life for the sake of apsaras. The Blessed One, it is said, guarantees that he will win those 500 dove-footed apsaras!"

### Nanda's arhathood

20 Then, the venerable Nanda, being troubled, ashamed, disgusted<sup>58</sup> with being called "hireling" and "one who is bought,"<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Abhirama nanda abhirama nanda, aham te pāṭibhogo pañcannaṃ accharā, satānaṃ paṭilābhāya kakuṭa, pādānan'ti.* As at DhA 1.6,9.2/1:119,11. "Surety," *pāṭibhoga*, A 2:172; U 17; It 1 f; J 2:93; Vism 555 f; DhA 1:398; VbhA 165; also Geiger & Norman, *Pali Grammar*, 2000 §24.

<sup>53</sup> *Sace me bhante bhagavā pāṭibhogo pañcannaṃ accharā, satānaṃ paṭilābhāya kakuṭa, pādānaṃ, abhiramissāmāham bhante bhagavati brahma, cariyēti* [Be so; Ee Se *bhagavā brahmacariye'ti*; Ka *bhagavā brahmacariyan'ti*].

<sup>54</sup> "Lives the holy life for the sake of apsaras," *accharānaṃ hetu brahma, cariyāṃ carati*.

<sup>55</sup> "Companion monks," *sahāyakā bhikkhū*. Clearly, they are the young monks close to Nanda, who are teasing him.

<sup>56</sup> On a renunciant as one not for fire, see **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8 (1.4.3).

<sup>57</sup> *Atha kho āyasmato nandassa sahāyakā bhikkhū āyasmantaṃ nandaṃ bhataka, vādena ca upakkitaka, vādena ca samudācaranti.* "One who is bought" (*upakkitaka*, U 23,17, also *upakīṭaka, upakkīṭaka*; from *upakkita* (fr *kiṇāti*, "he buys") + *ka*<sup>2</sup>, making it a n or adj; DP) has 2 senses: (1) one who is bought, purchased (a slave): "or, then, ... it is said that it is as if he had been one purchased by the Blessed One," *atha vā ... tena vikkayena bhagavatā upakkito viya hoṭṭi vuttam ~o ti* = AA 1:317,15 (Be so; Ce Ee Se *upakīṭako*) = DhA 1:119,24 (Be Ce Ee so; Se *upakkīṭako*); (2) a buyer (UA 173,28: "whoever buys anything with coins (*kahāpaṇa*) and so on is said to be a buyer: this venerable, too,...buys the holy life for himself," *yo kahāpaṇ'ādīhi kiñci kiñci kiṇāti so ~o ti vuccati, ayam pi āyasmā ... attano brahma, cariyāṃ kiṇāti*). Here, only the second meaning apparently applies. The first meaning can be used here, too, but would sound very strong. On a renunciant's being not for hire, see SD 45.3 (2.1.2.1).

<sup>58</sup> "Being troubled, ashamed, disgusted," *aṭṭiyamāno harāyamāno jigucchamāno*. This statement significantly shows that Nanda is conscientious (has moral shame and moral fear) and is contrite. The stock *aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi jigucchāmi* is found in **Vuṭṭha S** (A 9.11,4/4:377, spoken by a certain monk). The form *aṭṭiyāmi harāyāmi* is found in **Vijayā S** (S 5.4/530\*/1:31), **Khemā Thī** (Thī 140), and **Khalātya Pv** (Pv 1.10.2/8). For fuller analyses of these terms, see **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,5/1:213), SD 1.7 n & **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1 (2.3).

**21** dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute,  
in no long time at all, right here and now, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge,  
attained and dwelled in the supreme goal of the holy life,  
for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

21.2 THE ARHAT’S REVIEW KNOWLEDGE. He directly knew:

“Birth is destroyed,	<i>khīṇa,jāti</i>
the holy life has been lived,	<i>vusitam brahma,cariyaṃ</i>
done what is to be done,	<i>kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ</i>
there is no more of this state of being.” <sup>60</sup>	<i>nâparam itthattâyāti</i>

21.3 And the venerable Nanda became one of the arhats.

## A devata informs the Buddha

**22** Then, when the night was far gone,<sup>61</sup> a certain devata [brahma deity]<sup>62</sup> of exceeding radiance,  
exceeding beauty, lighting up the whole of Jeta’s grove, approached the Blessed One.

Having gone up to the Blessed One, he saluted him and then stood at one side.

**23** Standing there at one side, the devata said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, the venerable Nanda, the Blessed One’s brother and maternal aunt’s son,  
by realizing for myself through direct knowledge, right here and now,  
with the destruction of the mental influxes,<sup>63</sup>

I attain and dwell in the influx-free<sup>64</sup> freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom.<sup>65</sup>

**24** Then the knowledge arose in the Blessed One that

“Nanda has, *by realizing for myself through direct knowledge, right here and now,*  
*with the destruction of the mental influxes,*  
*I attain and dwell in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom.”*

<sup>59</sup> See (2.3.3.2).

<sup>60</sup> On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see **Poṭṭhapāda S** (D 9,56.2/1:203) n, SD 7.14.

<sup>61</sup> “When the night was far gone” (*abhikkantāya rattiyā*), ie the middle watch (between 10 pm and 2 am) (UA 175).

<sup>62</sup> Comy notes that this is a brahma deity who has also “attained the path,” ie an arhat or non-learner (*asekha*), so that he is able to know a similar attainment of Nanda’s (UA 175). This is an interesting note, as we have no other mention of devas or brahmas being arhats.

<sup>63</sup> “**Mental influxes,**” *āsava*. The term *āsava* (lit “inflow, outflow”) comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints”, RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists **4 influxes**: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kāma’sava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhava’sava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,1.12/2:82, 16,2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDic: *āsava*.

<sup>64</sup> “Influx-free” (*anasava*), ie, free from being conditioned by the mental influxes (*āsavānaṃ apaccaya,bhūtaṃ*, SA 2:174).

<sup>65</sup> “The freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom,” *ceto,vimuttiṃ paññā,vimuttiṃ*. This is not a dvandva, but a single conjunct cpd that describes the same state, arhathood. Comy explains “the freedom of mind” (*ceto,vimutti*) as the attainment of the fruition of arhathood (*arahatta,phala,samāpatti*), and “the freedom by wisdom” (*paññā,vimutti*) as the wisdom of the fruition of arhathood (*arahatta,phala,paññā*) (SA 2:174). A common term for both aspects is “freed both ways” (*ubhato,bhāga vimutta*): see **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15,36,2), SD 5.17. In **Mahā,nidāna S** (D 15,-36,2), SD 5.17 the Buddha declares to Ānanda that “one is called a monk who is liberated both ways” (*ayaṃ vuccat’-ānanda, bhikkhu ubhato.bhāga,vimutto*). In **the tenfold rightness** (*sammatta*) of the path, *ceto,vimutti* is “right freedom” (*sammā vimutti*) and *paññā,vimutti* is “right knowledge” (*sammā ñāna*). Here, “freedom” refers to **the 8 attainments** (*attha,samāpatti*)—the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments—mastered by the full-fledged arhat. The actual awakening is denoted by *sammā,ñāna*: see SD 10.16 (9+10). On *ceto,vimutti* as the mind’s freedom from the hindrances, see SD 38.5 (8.3).

## Nanda releases the Buddha of the bond

**25** Then, when the night was far gone, the venerable Nanda, approached the Blessed One.

Having approached and saluted the Blessed One, he sat down at one side.

Sitting thus at one side, the venerable Nanda said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, I hereby release the Blessed One from the agreement in which the Blessed One is my surety, bhante, as regards the obtaining of the 500 dove-footed apsaras.”<sup>66</sup>

**26** “I, too, Nanda, have known your own mind with mine, thus:

‘Nanda has, by realizing for himself through direct knowledge, right here and now,  
with the destruction of the mental influxes,  
attains and dwells in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom.

**27** A devata, too, has informed me of the matter, thus:

‘Bhante, the venerable Nanda, the Blessed One’s brother and maternal aunt’s son,  
by realizing for himself through direct knowledge, right here and now,  
with the destruction of the mental influxes,  
attains and dwells in the influx-free freedom of mind, freedom by wisdom.

**28** Indeed, Nanda, just as your mind is free from clinging, released from the mental influxes, I, too, am freed from the agreement.”<sup>67</sup>

## The verse of uplift

**29** Then, the Blessed One, knowing the significance of the occasion, uttered this udana [inspired utterance]:<sup>68</sup>

<p><b>30</b> <i>Yassa nittiṇṇo paṅko maddito kāma,kaṇḍako moha-k,khayaṃ anuppatto sukha,dukkhesu na vedhatī sa bhikkhūti</i></p>	<p>For him who has crossed over the mire, who has crushed sense-desire’s thorn, who has reached the destruction of delusion— that monk trembles not before joy or sorrow.</p>
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— evaṃ —

130901 130902 131216 141028 150515 161218 170630

<sup>66</sup> *Yaṃ me bhante bhagavā paṭibhogo pañcannaṃ accharā,satānaṃ paṭilābhāya kakuṭa,pādānaṃ, muñcāṃ ahaṃ bhante bhagavantaṃ etasmā paṭissavāti.*

<sup>67</sup> See (2.3.3.3 + 2.3.3.4).

<sup>68</sup> *Atha kho bhagavā etam atthaṃ viditvā tāyaṃ velāyaṃ imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi.*